

## CONTINUING CONFRONTATION BETWEEN SECULAR MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS CONVENTIONS: A READING OF ORHAN PAMUK'S SNOW

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### ABSTRACT

*In the Novel Snow, Orhan Pamuk has highlighted, in subtle manner, the deep cultural polarization and clash between the traditional Islamic world and the secular modern world, with its inherent conflicts and uncompromising attitude. It brilliantly exposes the socio-cultural condition of modern Turkey, which is characterized by tensions, polarizations, identity crisis and the undercurrents of many other boiling socio-political issues. The paper attempts to make a cultural analysis of the novel and thereby to scrutinise the workings of underlying cultural paradigms and social dynamics. It examines how Pamuk has portrayed secular ideologies and the conservative belief system in the novel and the way they constantly collide in Turkish soil. It touches upon some of the burning issues in Turkey like the secular extremism, growth of political Islam, banning of headscarf among others and the far-fetched implications of those issues in Turkish social context.*

**KEYWORDS:** Snow, Religion, Secularism, Political Islam, Kars & Headscarf

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Orhan Pamuk and Turkish Cultural Context

The rich and wide oeuvre of Orhan Pamuk divulged the reality of Turkish society and culture from the view point of a passionate and sensible creative mind. Rather than merely playing with figments of imagination and thereby render a sense of fantasy into words, Pamuk objectively analyses the society around him and attempts to provide an account of actual reality in his works. Therefore, he is largely successful in promulgating the basic undercurrents and assumptions of the social order around him. Religion played a crucial role in modifying the sensibility of Turkish psyche right from the Ottoman period. Even after Turkey emerged as a republic based on secularist modernity in the early part of twentieth century, traditional values, moral codes, belief system and others persisted in the country in one way or the other.

Ataturk transformed the visibly religious Ottoman Empire into a secular democratic nation by separating religion from state and public life. He restricted the use of veils and hijabs in schools and parliament. This new era is also marked by the replacement of traditional Arabic alphabet with the Latin one. In *Other Colours*, Pamuk reminds readers that nobody in Turkey can read Arabic script in the modern era and Turkey has “embraced Latin alphabet as part of the wholehearted acceptance of modernity” (192). It caused the marginalization of Islam, which was further viewed as a threat and impediment to set up a civilized and prosperous republic. Maeyda Yegenoglu examines the cultural impasse of Turkey in this regard:

The main social, political and cultural conflict between the secularists and the Islamists is rooted in the

exclusion of Islamic culture, ways of life and codes from the public domain as legitimate markers of Turkish identity. Current demands for more public visibility of Islamic identity, aesthetics and ways of life should be seen in the light of this historically rooted split (Yegenoglu).

As Yegenoglu points out, people became conscious of their religious identity and this sentiment is intensified in the later part of twentieth century. By this time, Turkey witnessed the rise of religious extremism and political Islam, which tirelessly created the ideological and physical confrontation with the secularist force and army. Pamuk has touched upon all these conflicting issues in his novel *Snow*.

*Snow* crucially examines the value system and political unrest deeply embedded in the recent history of Turkey. The novel touches upon the global issues of war, terror, war on terror etc. and provides a platform for debating political, religious, ethnic and communal issues prevalent in the modern era. As Merve Kavakci observes, the awkward political unrest is reverberated in *Snow*, “With *Snow*, Orhan Pamuk walks a fine line between reality and fiction. With a novelist’s acuteness, he presents some of the dire political and social realities of Turkey, illuminating the underlying themes of the domestic threats to the state edifice in Turkey, namely, Islam and Kurdish nationalism” (Kavakci-163).

The discussions in the novel largely focus on the choice before Turkey whether to follow their cultural tradition and to accept the identity of an Islamic nation based on the principles of Sharia or to choose the entry into European Union and thereby to secularize and westernize the nation. Since *Snow* concentrates on the discourse concerning political Islam and its implications in the Turkish cultural context, it opens a way for discussing the aspects of individual identity and social formation of reality. Pamuk seems to have hinted at the problematic issue of individual identity, especially whenever he uses words like Muslim, Islam and Islamist in the novel, for as Nilufer Gole puts it, these are different words denoting different political positions:

‘Muslim’ is not synonymous with ‘Islamist’ in the sense that the first expresses a religious identity and the latter implies a political consciousness and social action. Accordingly, Islamist counter-elites can be both actors in the Islamist movements and professionals and intellectuals aspiring for political power. Islamism however does not only denote membership in an Islamist political organization, but also suggests a sense of belonging and a group identity (Gole-47).

Ataturkian model of modernity diminished the prevalence of Islamic values in Turkey and secularist principles are endorsed and promoted as civilized in the newly emerged republic.

In *Snow*, Pamuk has made the theme and settings compatible by locating the background of the novel in the turbulent north-eastern border city in Turkey named Kars. The city is boiling with a number of socio-cultural and religious issues when the story begins. Important among them is the rising tendency among young educated girls to commit suicide, which almost became an epidemic by the time the protagonist Ka arrived the city. The apparent reason for the suicide is the denial from concerned authority the right to cover their heads in educational institutions where they pursue their studies and the young girls seek refuge in ending their lives. The banning of hijab has far-fetched implications in the global cultural context; especially the question of individual choice and freedom is concerned. Sheila Dillion has rightly connected the novel with the contemporary world in this regard, “Women and the veil is a topic of great contemporary currency and political urgency. From the controversial headscarf ban in French schools to Orhan Pamuk’s new novel *Snow*, the veil is a potent visual symbol of political Islam and the clash of civilizations” (Dillon- 682,83).

The ban of headscarves irked the rising Islamist outfit in the city, which is functioning under the charismatic leadership of Blue, a techie-turned Islamist who had spent many years in Europe. The issue has also intensified the tussle between secularism and Islamism in the novel. The political Islam movement finds a contradiction in the issue, since suicide is prohibited in Islam. Moreover, the religious affairs department of the government has undertaken many measures to tackle the issue, "As a preliminary measure, the Department of Religious Affairs had plastered the city with the posters Ka had seen the day before. They proclaimed: Human beings are God's masterpieces and suicide is blasphemy" (14). Nevertheless, the epidemic worsens, which infuriated Islamists who resort to extreme steps to fight against the government and the Atatürkian model of secularism. The gruesome murder of the director of an educational institute takes place as part of the protest from this fundamental group.

The city is also going to have a municipal election and the Islamist party gained considerable popularity among the voters. Its leader Muhtar is the running mayor candidate, who, along with other Islamists is making their tirade against the present regime. As Serdar Bay, the owner of the newspaper *Border City Gazette*, explains to Ka, the Islamists are running from door to door invoking religious sentiments, "They say, 'give your vote to the Prosperity Party, the party of God, we've fallen into this destitution because we've wandered off the path of God'" (26). Serdar Bey also informs Ka that Blue is camping in the city and actively campaigning for the Islamists. Moreover, the suicide issue is the focal point of the election and, when Ka tries to understand from Ipek the real reason for this extreme tendency, she aptly summarizes what is really happening to men and women in Kars:

Why is everyone in this city committing suicide? Asked Ka.

It's not everyone who's committing suicide, it's just girls and women, said Ipek. The men give themselves to religion, and the women kill themselves (35).

Ipek's reply aptly summarizes the real situation in Kars. On the one hand, men are drawn towards the rising extremist politics and resort to physical violence, which is, in her assessment, suicidal and women on the other hand, having no other way to protest against the secularist extremism, resort to end their life.

The assassination of Professor Nuriİlmas, the director of educational institution, takes place as part of the violent protest against the curbing of headscarves. The young Islamist brutally murders the director in cold blood in a cafe and openly admits that he is doing it in order to protect his faith and religion. He virtually conducts a trial for the professor before silencing him forever. He accuses professor for ruining the lives of young girls by not allowing them to follow their religious practices and thereby spoiling the basic principles of Islam. He even quotes Koran to justify his arguments:

With all due respect, Professor NuriYilmas- if you fear God, if you believe that the Holy Koran is the word of God, then let's hear your views on the beautiful 31<sup>st</sup> verse of the chapter entitled 'Heavenly Light'. Yes, it's true. This verse states very clearly that women should cover their heads and even their faces (40).

He accuses the director of being an agent of the infidels in Europe and severely reprimands the western notion of sexual freedom. In his argument, the secular principles are practiced only by the enemies of Islam. The professor remained baffled before the emotional outburst of the young Islamist. The long conversation between them reveals the deep seated anxiety and tension prevalent among the budding young Islamists all across Turkey.

## POLITICAL ISLAM: AN ALTERNATIVE IDEOLOGY?

Pamuk in fact seems to have taken a soft stand on the religious conservatives in the novel and the hard-line secularists often find themselves in dismay whenever the rationale of their violence is questioned. As Uner Daglier rightly notices, the contrast between the portrayal of these hard-line Islamists and secularists is obvious:

In contrast to individuating or modernizing Islamists in *Snow* who defy popular stereotypes, Pamuk's depiction of hard-line secularists is caricature. They are not able to defend their grounds on an intellectual plane; consequently, they are pathologically idealistic, exhibit authoritarian tendencies, and are prone to violence when conservative social realities clash with their enlightenment utopianism (17).

Thus, Pamuk also hints that Islamic modernization can also be a viable alternative than the forced secular modernization in Turkey. Moreover, he seems to have supported the agitation of Islamists against the banning of headscarves in educational institutions, especially when the girls vent their ire against the ban resorting to extreme steps. Rajmohan and Noorjahan argue that the novel instills the idea of individual freedom, "The headscarf is a recurring trope in *Snow*. The novel presents the dilemma of the headscarf girls, Hande and Teslime, who are dismissed from a local education institution in Kars, in north-eastern Turkey, the text that appears, upholds the right of the women to wear it" (2).

An important spokesperson of Conservative Islam in the novel, Muhtar, attempts to enlighten Ka while discussing about the changing socio-cultural scenario in Kars. Unlike Blue, he is not a radical Islamist and Pamuk seems to have used Muhtar as his spoke-person in the novel in order to analyze and explain the true nature of political Islam in Turkey. Muhtar does not believe in armed militancy and violence and he joins "Prosperity Party, the party of God" (*Snow*-26). In his assessment "this is after all a religious party, a party that values the spiritual side of my experience as a party member during my Marxist years prepared me well" (58-59). He had abandoned his atheistic life because of the influence of the Kurdish Sheikh, Saadettin Effendi who actually showed him "the road to God Almighty" (57).

Ka's meeting with Muhtar results in a long conversation about the relative merits of western model of secularism and Turkish conservative belief system. In Muhtar's words, "all these religious men are modest, gentle, understanding. Unlike westernized Turks, they don't instinctively despise the common folk. They're compassionate and wounded themselves" (62). Here Pamuk exposes the hypocrisy and double-standard of the cultural elites in Turkey, who followed the western model of liberalism and secularism. In Muhtar's words they are blindly imitating western model of modernity while paying little attention to the real issues in Turkey.

## THE PRESENCE OF RADICAL ISLAMISM

The novel features an important religious fundamentalist who is charismatic enough to influence the angry young generation in Kars. Ka's meeting with Blue has resulted in a heated discussion about the fundamental issues regarding religious-secular debate in Turkey. Ka comes to know that Blue used to be a godless leftist in the past and that he returned to Islamism because he was greatly influenced by the speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini. After coming to Kars, he acquired several admirers and, despite moving from one hideout to other, he has attained a powerful base in the city. The irony of the character of Blue is that even if he is an ardent Islamist and advocates the principles of Koran and Hadis, he is also featured as a chronic womanizer in the novel.

His sole purpose of life is to endorse the ideological base of political Islam and as he explains to Ka, "the most important thing today is not to pray or fast but to protect the Islamic faith" (328). Pamuk also hints that his activism is

imbedded in violence, "Blue's fame derived from the fact that he was held responsible for the murder of an effeminate, exhibitionist TV personality named Guner Bener" (71). The provocation was that Bener expressed some wrong remarks about Prophet Muhammad.

Blue is the embodiment of religious fanaticism in the novel and he is even ready to have a capital punishment in order to protect his faith. This is evident when he imperturbably rejects Ka's proposal that he can be saved, if Kadife bares her head on stage. This uncompromising attitude and sincere approach earned him high reputation among his followers. He considers himself as "an agent of Islam" (330) and seems to be well aware of his goals. Ka also perceives that Blue is "a mixture of pride and extraordinary tenderness" (239). Ka feels that the army is scared of Blue's charisma and it considers him to be an arduous enemy of the state. The round faced agent expresses it to Ka while interrogating him to know the whereabouts of Blue:

Blue was a dangerous terrorist and a formidable conspirator. He was a certified enemy of the republic and in the pay of Iran. It was certain that he had murdered a television presenter, so a warrant had been issued for his arrest. He had been sighted all over Turkey. He was organizing the fundamentalists" (182-183).

However, in Blue's version, the state is instigating violence in the city to justify the coup and he defends the deeds of Islamists with a calm composure. When he finds that he cannot escape from the confinement unless he agrees to Ka's proposal, he conveys his consent to allow Kadife to bare her head on stage. But as soon as he is released from prison, he changes the decision and exhibits his real nature of being a militant Islamist. Here Pamuk brands him to be 'the villain' and, on hearing this, Ka understands the meaning of righteousness for the first time after reaching Kars. Blue is killed by a military raid along with Hande. His death also signifies that fundamental attitude and militancy can never survive in the modern world.

## **THE SEEDS OF ATHEISM AMONG THE RADICALS**

Ka discerns that the young boys of the religious high school are fascinated by the Islamic ideology perpetuated by Blue. Ka meets a boy named Necip with his two classmates Fasil and Mesut. Necip tells him a story of a man who is infected with atheism and the man in the story is ultimately tormented by his atheistic disposition. They demand to know Ka's assessment of the story. Moreover, they also ask Ka a question which is very much difficult for him to answer, "do you or don't you believe that God Almighty created the universe everything in it, even the snow that is falling from the sky?" (85). Ka remain bewildered in front of them and being an educated and westernized secularist, they value Ka's words. The boys are so much confused that, when Mesut insists on getting a proper answer, Ka even feels that they too nurture the seeds of atheism deep in their heart:

You're not giving me an answer, said Mesut. If a person knows and loves God, he never doubts God's existence. It seems to me that you're not giving me an answer because you're too timid to admit that you're an atheist. But we knew this already. That's why I wanted to ask you a question on my friend Fasil's behalf. Do you suffer the same terrible pangs as the poor atheist in the story? Do you want to kill yourself? (58).

Ka admits to them that even when he felt most certain that he is an atheist he never felt the urge to commit suicide. Ka also discerns that those boys have a sentimental attachment with the suicide issue. Fasil defends the objectives of the girls who committed suicide by saying that what they did was simply to protect their religion and faith. At this moment a most beautiful poem comes to Ka's mind and right after reaching his room he writes the poem and gives the

name 'Snow'. For him, the only emotional solace from the existential crisis comes from poetry and, in fact, he renders the religious conflicts within him into words. Later, when he meets Necip again, the situation turns out to provide some intense moments of deliberations on spirituality and atheism. By citing a personal fantasy, Necip confesses that he is curious to know whether God truly exists or not and as Uner Daglier rightly observes, he does not fit into the traditional stereotypes, "Even those Islamists with unqualifiedly traditional backgrounds in the novel are prone to defy stereotypes. For example, Necip who is a devoutly religious student of the local imam-preacher high school (imam hatiplisesi) expresses traces of doubt concerning the existence of God" (17). He entreats Ka to provide a possible solution for his dilemma. Ka feels that Necip's belief is crumbling and, just like others in Kars, he too shares a less self-assured conviction. But Necip is too adamant to subscribe to Ka's views:

I looked it up in an encyclopedia once, and it said that the word 'atheist' comes from the Greek word 'athos'. But that word doesn't refer to people who don't believe in God: it refers to the lonely ones, the people whom the gods have abandoned. And so this proves that people can't really be atheists, because even if we wanted Him to, God would never abandon us here. To become an atheist, then, you must first become a Westerner.

I'd prefer to be a westerner and a believer, said Ka (145).

Through these boys, Pamuk communicates the impacts and influence of political Islam among the young generation of Kars, especially among the boys in religious high-school. They explain to Ka the way political Islam is viewed in Turkey, "political Islamist is just a name that westerners and secularists give to us Muslims who are ready to fight for our religion" (69).

## KA: THE PROTOTYPE OF CONFUSED TURK

Pamuk has portrayed the protagonist Ka as a muddled man who is caught between atheism and religious belief and he carries this internal conflict and confusion throughout his life. He grew up in a secular and liberal family and did not have any formal religious education in his childhood. However, he was never ever associated with any organization in favour or against secularist thoughts. The oscillating nature of Ka in terms of his religious belief is echoed as he moves from childhood to the grown-up stage. In his childhood, he frequently visits 'Tevkiye Mosque' with others. But instead of offering prayer, he largely spends his time in the mosque to play with other children. All the same, "at school, I memorized all the prayers very well, to ingratiate myself with the teacher. He helped us memories the *fathiha* by hitting us... but then I forgot it all" (95).

When Ka receives a letter from Sheikh Saadettin, the moderate spiritual leader of the town for a meeting, the secularist within him felt uncertain and he asks Ipek's advice regarding the matter. She identifies the vulnerable part of his mind and posits her concern straightforward, "Are you worried that the sheikh will discover a God-fearing part of you and send you scurrying back into the fold?" (93). Ipek's apprehension is rightly reflected on Ka's face when he meets the Sheikh, who endeavours to enlighten Ka of the importance of spirituality and the possibility of having divine grace. Ka's inner struggle is more revealed here and he acknowledges his own turbulent state of mind at last, "I want to believe in the God you believe in and be like you, but, because there is a westerner inside me, my mind is confused" (100). He goes on asking the Sheikh about the probability of attaining humility in life and posits all his internal anxiety with ease.

When Kadife, the younger sister of Ipek, meets Ka, he could sense out of her demeanor that she is more radically sentimental towards the burning issues in Kars than anybody else he has already met in the city. She severely criticizes the

rubbish reforms being implemented in the name of modernity. Moreover, she is the undeclared leader of the girls who are against the ban of headscarves in public places and she openly condemns Ka for being an atheist, "I will say that I am not prepared to discuss my faith with an atheist- or even a secularist" (114). She explains to Ka why she remains to be the leader of the girls who are trying to protect their faith. Her transformation from a fashionable modern girl to an ardent activist of Islamism astounds Ka and he further learns, "she'd go on television and bare her bottom, and flaunt her legs" (110). She used to be a model and the daughter of a 'proclaimed atheist'. But now she is the leader of the headscarf movement in the city and ardently protects the interests of political Islam. She blurts out to Ka, "I'm not one of those Islamist toadies who go around trying to convince secularists that Islam can be a secular religion" (114).

Later, at the dining room of the hotel, Kadife introduces her friend Hande to Ka. Hande explains to Ka the circumstances which led to the suicide of one of her friends named Taslime. The story makes everyone in the table deeply tensed and Ka could discern that the real situation in Kars is beyond his mere imagination. Hande positively explains the real motif of the girls who took the extreme step, "...For girls like that a suicide wish is a wish for innocence and purity" (126). She is also desperately trying in vain to concentrate and articulate all her pangs in the form of poetry. But Kadife disdains Taslime's act because in her view, "Human beings are God's masterpieces and suicide is blasphemy... If you turn to the twenty ninth line of the Nisa verse of the Glorious Koran, you'll see that suicide is clearly prohibited" (114). She further elaborates that all followers of Islam have the responsibility of adhering to the words of Allah. Ka recognizes that she has aptly comprehended the principles of Sharia and that she harbours a sense of regret for her past life of being a non-believer. She openly admits it before him, "Now I've come to see that God put me through all his suffering to help me find the true path. Once I was an atheist, like you" (116).

Kadife admires Blue and the paradoxical part of it is that she functions not only as a close aid of Blue; she is also a mistress to him. By the end of the novel, she is even ready to abandon her belief by baring her head as part of a theatre performance in order to save Blue from execution and thereby endorse secularist ideas. It infuriates not only the followers of political Islam, but the general believers as well.

Pamuk has created the characters in the novel in such a way as to make them compatible to the tensed atmosphere of Turkey in general and Kars in particular. Turgut Bey appears in the novel as an introvert father, who is driven by an ambiguous longing for liberal and secular way of life. He used to be a left-wing radical in the past and was largely exposed to European culture as well. All the same, he is too timid to accept that he is an atheist and, to a great extent, his mind is oscillating between faith and atheism. As Pamuk features him in the novel, "Stubborn and quarrelsome though he was, he was too soft-hearted to be an implacable atheist" (131). Even if he favours the army coup and strongly criticises the Islamists for being violent, he is reluctant to allow Kadife to bare her head on stage and he expresses his concern to FundaEser, "If my daughter does this, the religious fanatics in this city will never forgive her" (353).

## **KEMALISM AND SECULARIST IDEOLOGY**

The staging of revolutionary plays and an army coup mark the turning points in the novel. The radical theatre activist Sunay Zaim and his wife Funda Eser invite Ka to recite his poems as part of a stage performance. As soon as Ka finished the poem, the announcement regarding the main performance of the day, the play '*My fatherland or my head scarf*' is heard. The play features a woman who bares her head and thereby declares her independence. It creates a ripple among the audience and many viewers stand bewildered due to the unprecedented spectacle. The boys from the religious high school get so much annoyed that they start making their voices of protest against this apparently anti-religious

exhibition. Some of them jump on to the stage and their attempt is to punish Funda Eser for violating God's law:

From this point on, the situation escalated very quickly. Two religious fanatics sporting round beards and skullcaps appeared on stage. They carried ropes and knives and left no one in any doubt that they were there to punish Funda Eser for burning her scarf and defying God's law (156).

Very soon Sunay Zaim, wearing military uniform in the style of Ataturk, comes to rescue Funda. It leads to a coup and Sunay assumes absolute power. The young Islamists including Necip violently protest, "Damn the godless secularists! Damn the fascist infidels!" (159) and suddenly the army men with loaded rifles stand guard on stage. The protesting voices are silenced with bullets. Many protesting youths, including Necip, are killed. It seems to Ka that Sunay has been planning such a move right from the preparations for the play and Sunay declares, "This is not a play- it is the beginning of a revolution." (163). Now under the commanding voice of Sunay, the army completely takes over the control of Kars. The army attacked and demolished the "religious high school dormitory" (172).

Sunay advocates the principles of Kemalism throughout this life, which attempted to provide a new identity for Turkey. As against the Ottoman effort to bring about an Islamic civil society in Turkey, Kemalism upheld the relevance and values of secularism. Sunay uses theatre for propagating his ideas of secularism along with FundaEser. The production of the play *My Fatherland or My Headscarf* is thus a brilliant exposition of female independence, in which FundaEser unveils herself as a proclamation of freedom. Even if the production of the play is an attempt to unite the Islamists and secularists, the overall effect was just the opposite and it ultimately leads to the coup, "Fear of the political Islamists was so great that they had long ago accepted that the city must remain as it always had been. I say 'dreams', but not even in their sleep, they have imagined the state forcing women to remove their headscarves as it had done in the early years of the republic" (151).

Ka finds the situation in Kars worsening even after the army took absolute power. The Islamists intensified their agitation by actively seeking external support. Even if he is at the threshold of happiness, with the prospect of having a happy life with Ipek in Frankfurt, he feels that his life is doomed in that conflict-ridden city. The fate of many secularist liberals passes through his mind at this critical juncture:

The many writers killed in recent years by Islamist bullets paraded before his eyes: first the old imam-turned-atheist who had tried to point out 'inconsistencies' in the Koran (they'd shot him from behind, in the head); then the righteous columnist whose love of positivism had led him to refer in a number of articles to girls wearing headscarves as 'cockroaches' (they strafed him and his chauffeur one morning as they drove to work), and finally there was the determined investigative journalist who had tenaciously sought to uncover the links between the Turkish Islamist movement and Iran (when he turned the key, he and his car were blown into the sky) (303-304).

The thought of all those martyrs infuse severe mental distress in him. His insecurity primarily arises out of his identity as a secularist writer and notion of being a westernised liberal also puts him in great anguish.

The staging of the second play *A Tragedy in Kars* confirms Sunay's commitment to enlighten people to develop secularist ideas. He manages to make Kadife perform the role of a revolutionary woman who bares her head on stage. As Sunay explains to Kadife, the objective of the performance is to free the women of Turkey from their conservative religious framework. She concedes to this demand also because of her love for Blue. In the performance, after having a long heated argument with the fellow character, she uncovers herself, "Anguish flashed across her face, then, with a clean,



single stroke, she lifted her hand and pulled off her scar" (412). Very soon, while the audience look at her bare head, she shoots Sunay, which kills him instantly, "Kadife's last words (I guess I killed him) had turned her into something of an urban legend" (415).

## CONCLUSIONS

Pamuk has brilliantly portrayed the politics of religion and secularism in the novel and while exposing the inherent clashes between secular laws and religious customs in Turkey, he attempts to address a crucial contemporary issue with global significance. Pamuk asserts that these clashes in the name of belief virtually ruin the life ordinary people who believe in peace and harmony. This is exactly what is happening to the harmless innocents in the novel, whose lives undergo drastic transformations as tension escalates around them. Ka makes a critical observation on the situation in Kars and communicates the cultural condition of Turkey in the perspective of a foreigner and a native Turk. But his life ultimately ends in the hands of some Islamic militants, the followers of Blue:

...those young Islamists were following the same path Blue had taken on his own pilgrimage. They'd escaped to Germany, had founded a fast-growing radical Islamist group in Berlin, and, according to Fazil's old classmates from the religious high-school, had written a statement- published on the first page of a German based journal called *pilgrimage*- in which they'd vowed revenge against those responsible for Blue's death. It was this group, we guessed, that had killed Ka (433).

Ironically, the perpetrators of violence and communal clashes also fall prey to their own violence by the end of the novel.

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